
**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**

Re: *Schools and Libraries Universal Support Mechanism*, CC Docket No. 02-6; *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket No. 96-45; *Changes to the Board of Directors of the National Exchange Carrier Association, Inc.*, CC Docket No. 97-21, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (February 16, 2023).

For too long, those on Tribal lands have remained on the wrong side of the digital divide. Today's item builds on our 2022 Order that helped expand broadband access on Tribal lands by clarifying that Tribal libraries could participate in E-Rate, and by launching the *Tribal Library Pilot Program*.¹

But there is more work to be done. Last year, I visited the Denver Indian Center, which serves as a gathering point for the over 60,000 strong American Indian community located in Colorado. The Denver Indian Center provides its community with support ranging from food banks to workforce programs, and is heavily focused on supporting connectivity. Along with Rick Waters, its Executive Director, and his colleagues, we discussed the challenges facing Tribes in Colorado and beyond, including the lack of broadband availability and the need for community anchors to be connected and supported. The reality is that broadband deployment to communities with dual-functioning libraries is low, and only a small amount of Tribal libraries have applied for E-Rate funding due to the complexity of the application process.

But that changes now. This item proposes and seeks comment on how to simplify sections of our E-Rate application process. I hope we can quickly move to order so that we can help support the connectivity needs of those living on Tribal lands. Thank you to the FCC's fantastic staff for their work on this item. It has my support.

¹ See *Schools and Libraries Universal Service Support Mechanism*, CC Docket No. 02-6, Report and Order, FCC 22-8 (2022).